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The Influence of the Spiritual Evolution of Aubrey De Vere Upon His Poetry

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION OF AUBREY DE VERE UPON HIS POETRY

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The Problem

To show that the poetry of Aubrey de Vere is so influenced by his deep religious feeling that without this element it would be almost lacking in merit.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the effects of the Oxford Movement was to bring about a renaissance in the field of Catholic letters. To such an extent is this true that the revival in Catholic writing that we are experiencing today is said to begin with John Henry Newman.

Aubrey Thomas De Vere is a poet little known to the twentieth century. Poetry which deals with religion, and especially poetry which is concerned with the theological aspects of it, rarely enjoys wide popularity, and De Vere's works are no exception.

The purpose of this thesis is to prove that one influence in the life of Aubrey de Vere above all others dominated his work, the influence of religion. In the accomplishment of this aim, it will be possible, at the same time, to achieve certain minor purposes - to determine, to some extent, the caliber of De Vere's poetry and to place him, with some degree of accuracy, among his fellow religious poets of the nineteenth century.

The field of De Vere's writings is practically untouched. Wilfred Ward's book, Aubrey de Vere - A Memoir, is the only detailed critical study of the poet available. For material, then, it was necessary to rely almost entirely upon the author's own works - on his published Recollections and his poetry.

It seemed advisable before tracing the spiritual evolution of the poet through his poetic works to attempt to explain it in part, at least, by a study of his early environment. And so the first chapter of Part One of the thesis is an analysis of the early influences in the poet's life - his parents, his teachers, and his friends as they are revealed in the Recollections and in Ward's book. Chapter two of Part One traces the spiritual development of the poet from approximately his thirty-fifth year (1849), through his conversion in 1851, and his first year as a Catholic. The history of the poet's religious opinions is nowhere better expressed than in his correspondence, and so chapter two is based almost entirely upon the poet's own letters and, to a far less extent, upon his testimony as it is found in the Recollections.

Chapter one of Part Two is the most important section of the thesis. It utilizes as source material the four collections of poetry published after the poet's conversion, analyzes them for inspiration chiefly, noting, at the same time, the expression of that inspiration - the poetic mediums employed. Chapter two of Part Two includes some biographical material on the later years of De Vere's life, but its chief purpose is to contrast De Vere briefly with three religious poets of his time - Francis Thompson, Coventry Patmore, and Cardinal Newman, and in that way to determine the poet's place among the Catholic poets of the nineteenth century.

PART I

Chapter I

Aubrey De Vere's Life to the Time of His Spiritual Evolution.

In order to understand the poetry of Aubrey de Vere it is necessary to understand the character of the man himself, and that can best be done by examining those influences which surrounded his boyhood, especially the individuals from whom he gained many of his ideas and his culture. De Vere's poetry is characterized by two prominent qualities -- the poet's profound religious devotion and his appreciation and love for his country. The sources of both these characteristics may be traced to Curragh Chase near Limerick, where the poet was born in 1814. He was the third son of Aubrey de Vere from whom he inherited his poetic tendencies, and of Mary Spring Rice, sister of the first Lord Monteagle.

The home life of the De Vere's was religious, moral, and cultural -- a fact that is brought out by incidents which the poet confides in his Recollections. So insignificant a detail as a grandmother's 'good night' suggests nevertheless the ideal that was kept before the little boy's mind: "God bless you, child, and make a good man of you." Long years afterward De Vere remembered this maternal farewell and referred to it -- one of the sentences first heard and longest retained. His grandfather, Sir Vere Hunt, was a man of splendid ability and to him can be traced one of the poet's predominant virtues -- his real and charitable sympathy for the poorer classes. With the land problem in Ireland De Vere was familiar from his earliest days, and his intense desire to see

it solved satisfactorily and fairly was based upon a philosophy that was wholly Christian, a philosophy that could be traced to his own father and to his grandfather.

The De Vere children played with those of the laborers who were employed by their father, so that Aubrey's boyhood associations were not limited to his own class. The poet's later sympathies with the poor found their source in actual association with them and not from just hearing about them although the strong opinions of his father and grandfather on the injustices done to the lower classes, and their distaste for the so-called statesmen who were either ignorant of, or what was worse, indifferent to the wrongs, made an enduring impression upon the boy's mind.

From Sir Aubrey de Vere the poet seems to have acquired his generosity, certainly his literary ability, and that sensitiveness that was so definitely a part of his nature. His father's dramatic poems were praised in the highest quarters. Important is it to note that in his father the boy found the Christian virtues which were to dominate his own character. Once more an incident gives insight, this time, into moral principles. Sir Aubrey de Vere was questioned on one occasion as to which poet he considered greater -- Scott or Byron. His reply was emphatic -- "Scott, because he is as great, and he is a good man also."

Aubrey's mother - and the poet throughout his life

was exceedingly devoted to her - combined with her gentle culture a fervent religious devotion which the poet found a constant inspiration, even though Lady de Vere never embraced her son's religion.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the kind of home from which the poet came. That he appreciated its goodness and that he was deeply attached to it is proved best by the fact that even after he was very old he returned frequently to Curragh Chase to relive the many happy events which he had experienced, and finally to spend his last days there. Sentiment was a dominant characteristic of De Vere's personality and about nothing was he more sentimental in the best sense than about his home. The poet becomes almost rhapsodic in recalling the experiences of his boyhood, and we who read them years afterward are able to detect in them the reasons for his profound appreciation of the beauties of nature. He writes:

> My recollections in connection with these, my early years, are chiefly rural and sylvan. They come to me fragrant with the smell of the new-mown grass in the pleasure grounds, the breath of the cows as they stand still to be milked, rolling their eyes in quiet pleasure, with a majestic slowness such as the Greeks attributed to the eyes of Juno. No change was desired by us and little came. (1)

The poet recalls "the winds of early spring, the blackbird who gave us again his rough strong note." "Each

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(1) Recollections of Aubrey de Vere, II, p. 33.

year we watched the succession of the flowers, and if the blue-bell or the cowslip came a little before or a little after the proper time, we felt as much aggrieved as the child who misses the word he is accustomed to in the story heard a hundred times before." And what is most interesting about Aubrey de Vere, because it is so true of him is that he never, although he lived to be very old indeed - eighty eight years - lost the breathless expectancy nor the childlike delight in all that was beautiful whether it was in nature, in literature, in art, or in his religion.

Just as Aubrey de Vere's character can be traced easily to his home environment, many of the distinguishing marks of his poetry can be traced to the caliber of the men who were his early tutors. The poet recalls both of them with warmth and with appreciation: William St. George Pellissier whom he characterizes as high principled, moral, religious, and a great classical scholar, was the first.

> I had an enthusiastic admiration for him. That sentiment he was far from reciprocating; for, so slow was I at my Latin for a boy of ten years, that he desired me to discard it altogether, inasmuch as I was an idiot. I asked him what, that being the case, I was to do. To which he replied that I might cultivate the moral faculties since I had not the intellectual, and also make traceries of maps, laying them level upon glass. I asked him whether the moral faculties or the intellectual were the better; to which he replied that the moral were, seeing that good men took such with them to heaven, whereas the intellectual faculties underwent strange revolution after death -- an answer which entirely contented me. (2)

(2) Recollections, I, p. 18.

Fortunately Sir Aubrey de Vere did not receive the announced termination of his son's classical education with placidity, and so the Latin continued, the student gradually progressed, and the origins of the frequent classical references in the poet's works are explained. While Pelissier may have found in young Aubrey a somewhat lagging classical scholar, he must have found him a most apt pupil of literature, for it is to this man that De Vere attributes his love for Shakespeare.

Edward Johnstone succeeded Pellissier as Aubrey's tutor, and to him likewise we are able to trace two aspects of the poet's character. Of Johnstone De Vere says that he was "kindly, upright, and religious" and that he was "an ardent admirer of Wordsworth." It is possible, as has already been pointed out, to find other sources of De Vere's own kind, upright, religious nature but until this point the poet's tremendous admiration of Wordsworth has not been accounted for except, of course, by the fact that Aubrey's appreciation of even the tiniest beauties of nature was intense.

The picture of De Vere's home life as a contributing explanation for his poetry would not be complete if no mention was made of his companions, of the boys with whom he associated. De Vere had two brothers older than himself and the poet describes the order of their day:

> Our home life pursued the even tenor of its way. We, the three elder brothers, worked at our classics in the morning, and in the afternoon took

> a long ride, for each of us boasted a horse, though we seldom rode together; and in the evening there was often music, especially when Lord Monteagle was with us, for he and his sister, my mother, had used to play duets from Mozart in their youth, he on the flute, and she on the pianoforte, and they continued the habit in advanced life. (3)

One of De Vere's boyhood friends was Gerald Griffin, described by the poet as "a man of remarkable genius," whom Sir Aubrey de Vere had invited to Curragh Chase that he might have leisure and a quiet place in which to write. Griffin eventually joined the Christian Brothers, after taking pains first to destroy his manuscripts. De Vere recalls him as "dignified, eminently handsome," as well as "refined and intellectual."

It was when Aubrey was seventeen, however, that he met the man whom he believed of all others was the most brilliant man he ever knew -- Sir William Rowan Hamilton, who was ten years older than young De Vere. So great was his influence on the boy that it is best to let the poet himself explain it:

> .....I had often heard of him as the prodigy of that university, one who on entering it had sent in an essay written in fourteen or fifteen different languages, most of them being Oriental, Greek being the latest which he had learned, and who during his course at Trinity College had successfully carried off every prize open to his competition whether in classics or in science. At the age of twenty-

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(3) Recollections, I, p. 22.

> two he had published a mathematical essay, "Systems of Rays", of which one of the chief men of science then living pronounced that 'it had made a new science of mathematical optics.'
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> One's first impression was that he was a great embodied intellect rather than a human being..... The moral expression of his countenance corresponded with the intellectual. What it indicated was, when there was nothing to disturb him, an unbounded reverence. It was as if constant recollection of what is above us rendered him but half conscious of the things around. (4)

With the man of these spiritual and intellectual attainments the youthful Aubrey used to sit up until sunrise drinking in knowledge and wisdom, and storing it up for later use. One idea in particular which De Vere gained from Hamilton concerned poetry and Aubrey never forgot it.

> It is no conceit in a poet if he sees much more in his own poetry than others see; with its associations it must possess more; but he must remember that the merit which it possesses at once for himself and for others is all the merit that belongs to it objectively. (5)

It was just one year after De Vere met Hamilton for the first time that he undertook to write his first poetry. His motive for these attempts is a modest one simply stated -- I wished "to preserve a record of reflections and occurrences that had interested me." Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley were the chief models for the neophyte and it is interesting to note the degree and the kind of influence each

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(4) Recollections, II, p. 40.

(5) Ibid., p. 44.

one exercised.

De Vere's devotion to Wordsworth amounted almost to idolatry and what is significant about it is that it endured from the time that Aubrey's first poems were in sonnet form because Wordsworth wrote sonnets, until De Vere in later manhood, his philosophy having progressed far beyond that of his idol, made yearly pilgrimages to the grave at Rydal. Many years later De Vere himself explained what he believed to be the secret of Wordsworth's great influence over him:

> A true poet lives a true life, and by that life his genius and its products must have been substantially modified. It is this also which gives to great poetry, and especially to Wordsworth's, its extraordinary influence over as many as enter into vital relations with it. (6)

De Vere believed that the poetry of Wordsworth contained a large number of intellectual and moral qualities; that these qualities were blended into an absolute unity; that from "their united expression" there results "masterful moral strength."

De Vere admired Coleridge as second to Wordsworth and addressed one of his first sonnets to him. In commenting upon an earnest but fleeting attachment for Byron he refers to it as "the Byronic sulk" from which Wordsworth "exorcised" him. His own comment on Shelley:

> Shelley's poetry also had helped to deliver me

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(6) De Vere -- Essays Chiefly Lyrical, X, p. 320, 1883.

> from the influence of Byron's. An excellent tutor, Edward Johnstone, had written a critique on it. It was full of discrimination, and did full justice to the poet's genius, while deploring his religious errors..... About the same time I became acquainted also with the poetry of Keats, Landor, and Coleridge. We used to read them driving about our woods in a pony carriage..... Some times we read them by night to the sound of an Aeolian harp, still in my possession. (7)

One other factor contributed to the wealth of imagery that De Vere was able to infuse into his poetry, and that was the great amount of travel enjoyed by the poet. Throughout his life, from his early boyhood until he returned to Curragh Chase for the last time, he wandered leisurely and appreciatively through England and Switzerland, France and Italy. De Vere's keen powers of observation enabled him to note every detail of every scene, and on no occasion is this fact better brought out than on that of the poet's sojourn to Tinturn Abbey, an event made doubly significant to De Vere because of its connection with Wordsworth.

> When I reached Tinturn the moon had climbed over the woody ridges, and shone on the gray walls with a brilliance that made the southern arch, seventy feet high, look as dark as the mouth of a cave. Close by the ruin stood one of those clean and beautiful inns, special to England. They gave me a well-furnished bedroom, though one so small that the honeysuckles which made their way through the open window trailed onto the bed. Very soon I sallied out to see the ruins. The gates were locked, but I was left free to walk round and round the building, and get glimpses into the interior through the long windows, the traceries of which cast their

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(7) Recollections, III, p. 60.

> ebony bars over plots of green whitened by moon-beams. The wind sighed in the ivy, and the river murmured close by; and there was no sound beside except that of an old white horse which cropped his meal in the church-yard and left an occasional sigh on the sward. (8)

It was in 1841 that De Vere made one of the more treasured friendships of his life in the person of Miss Fenwick whom Wordsworth had looked upon as his closest friend during his declining years. It was at her home that De Vere actually met the man whose poetry he had admired above all others. With him De Vere took long walks during which they conversed on Wordsworth's two favorite subjects -- nature and poetry. De Vere epitomizes Wordsworth's opinions on the latter subject: "He was never tired of insisting on it that the soul of poetry was Truth. But Truth was not the only master whom poetry served. According to him the Muse owed service to a mistress, as well as to a master." (9) The mistress is Love.

Miss Fenwick was responsible for introducing De Vere to Mrs. Edward Villiers, with whom he carried on a long correspondence, and to Hartley Coleridge. A dinner-table argument between Mr. Edward Quillinan and Hartley Coleridge over a definition of Liberty discloses De Vere in the role of peacemaker and delineates his gentle humorous tact. "I remember a definition of Liberty on which I think the strongest

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(8) Recollections, VII, p. 115.

(9) Ibid., p. 134.

zealots for Freedom or Order might agree. It is this:

> 'What then is freedom? Rightly understood
> A universal license to be good.'

Quillinan couldn't object because the lines are truly conservative. Coleridge couldn't because they were his own."

A trip to Rome which was prophetic of a later journey to the same city, was made by the poet in 1843 in the company of Sir Henry Taylor and his wife. De Vere portrays Taylor, who was himself a writer, as a fine character of extraordinary moral strength. About the same time he made the acquaintance of Sara Coleridge and to her he writes a rather concise summary of his early influences:

> I am not now quite so much a believer in idols as once..... I threw off Byron early, as a vicious young horse throws off a bad rider, and I have outgrown Shelley though not all my admiration for his wonderful genius; but there remains unsubverted one throne occupied by an aged man with dreamy eyes, and lips once brightened by Parnassian springs, and still breathing Elysian airs. I believe his name is S. T. Coleridge. (10)

And in still another letter:

> My admiration of Wordsworth is composed of two different elements, namely, my admiration of what is peculiar to his genius and my admiration of what he has in common with other first-class poets; I must therefore adjust the balance between these two admirations; and therefore I cannot agree with those who admire even the inferior poems of his earlier and most characteristic manner more than the best poems written in his later style. (11)

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(10) Recollections, X, p. 199-200.

(11) Ibid., p. 204.

The tranquil religious atmosphere of De Vere's home life combined with the natural beauty of his home surroundings, the moral excellence and religious fervor of his parents, grandparents, teachers and friends, contributed to a great degree to his poetry. They contributed also to his spiritual evolution and to his conversion to the Catholic Church, for it should be remembered of De Vere that his final acceptance of the Catholic Faith was definitely an evolution, and not a revolution, of those moral principles and great religious truths which had been instilled in him from his boyhood. It was when his grasp upon those ideas seemed threatened by the tremendous surging wave of infidelity, those ideas which he had been taught to reverence as God's revelation to man, that he began to seek for a safe harbor whose waters were untroubled.

PART I

Chapter II

The Spiritual Evolution of Aubrey de Vere.

In one of his May Carols written after his reception into the Catholic Church at the request of Pope Pius IX, De Vere writes:

> Three worlds there are: the first of Sense-
> That sensuous earth which round us lies;
> The next of Faith's intelligence;
> The third of Glory in the skies. (12)

In the second of these worlds did the poet himself find his deepest satisfaction, a world from which he looked beyond to "the third of Glory", scarcely seeming aware of the first except insofar as its sensuous beauty explained or foreshadowed the other two.

De Vere's interest in religion, which became especially acute when he was about thirty-five, was shared by many other men of the time, for we recall that this period between 1835 and 1850 witnessed the theological and philosophical rumblings of the Oxford Movement and the departure of John Henry Newman from the Church of England to the Catholic Church.

It has already been pointed out, although briefly, that De Vere's submission to the Church did not effect any tremendous changes in his life, either in his ideas or in his manner of living. He did not, for example, find his way to the Church after wandering long years in a wilderness of

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(12) Aubrey de Vere, May Carols, p. 78.

atheism or agnosticism. Nor was he one who had known by experience the disillusionment to be found in the world's pleasures. Rather, the best explanation of De Vere's change in spiritual allegiance is to be found in a single line of his Recollections, and it is said of the Church of Aubrey's youth - the Church of England: "I have loved her well and long; but I cannot love her blindly." (13)

That sentence reveals a great truth of Aubrey de Vere's character. He did love the Anglican Church much as he loved Curragh Chase, as something which he believed stood for goodness and truth, and for which he had, in addition, a very real sentimental attachment. And before we can understand clearly his conversion, we must understand first his character, and the two traits which dominated it. De Vere sought above everything else in life moral truth. He looked for it in his friends, in the poets that he admired and imitated, and in, of course, the Church to which he gave his spiritual loyalty. As long as he believed that truth was to be found in the Anglican fold he remained there. We shall find that in choosing the Catholic Church it was necessary for De Vere to sacrifice to his dominant characteristic -- desire for moral truth -- the second strong characteristic which was almost as powerful -- his sentimental attachment to the Church which he

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(13) W. Ward, Aubrey de Vere - A Memoir, p. 185.

associated with his home and boyhood.

Some of the influences which effected De Vere's conversion were responsible likewise for the change in religious faith of the two great converts of the nineteenth century -- John Henry Newman and Henry Edward Manning. It can be said of all three men, Newman, Manning, and De Vere, that they entered the Catholic Church when they had satisfied themselves that the Church of England was not what they had thought her to be.

It is important to understand, first of all, that all three men had believed most, at least, of the great Christian religious truths all of their lives. These truths, they contended, had been revealed by God to man through Christ, and it was the important mission of the Christian Church to safeguard those truths absolutely, because it was only in their light that she could sanctify men. As long as Newman and Manning and De Vere believed the Church of England to be a part of that historic Church to which Christ had entrusted the divine commission to teach, they remained loyal sons. But the Gorham Judgment, passed in 1845, which made the question of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration an open one, disowned, so they thought, the principles of the early Church. At the time that the Judgment was passed Newman had already been received into the Catholic Church, but its effects upon Manning and De Vere were important.

Manning was one of those who formally protested

the Judgment, and his comment following its passing throws light upon the spiritual chaos of the period:

> Our position is not pleasant..... The waves rise; our vessel leaks, and assumes besides, a good deal the look of a merchant vessel. Near us rides a ship, vast, majestic, and secure. But then there remains an ugly doubt, when we think of the charges brought against her in our youth -- namely, may not that stately ship have come from an infected port and have the plague on board? (14)

De Vere was faced with two alternatives. By making the doctrine of Baptism a matter of private judgment the Church of England had abandoned the traditional Catholic position of interpreter of Church principles. As long as he believed those principles to be important, De Vere could not, in conscience, remain a member of a Church which apparently did not think them important. He should therefore, leave the Church of England, and go in search of a Church which retained the principles of the early Church Fathers.

But there was still another alternative. Perhaps these principles were not as important as he had thought; perhaps a rigid insistence upon their correct definition was not as important to a nineteenth century Church as it had been to one struggling for existence in the early centuries. And so, just as Newman had done, De Vere turned to the early writings

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(14) Aubrey de Vere, Recollections, XIV, p. 294.

of the Church:

> The conclusion at which I eventually arrived was this: that Church Principles were an essential part of Christianity itself and not an ornamental adjunct of it; and they were external, not as our clothes are, but as the skin is external to the rest of our body. The Apostles Creed has affirmed three supreme doctrines which include all others -- namely, The Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Church. What God had joined it was not for man to separate. God's revelation was given. (15)

This conclusion made, of course, a continuance of De Vere's allegiance to the Church of England impossible. He was still, however, a long way from actual reception into the Catholic Church. Yet his gradual change in attitude may be traced to the conclusion regarding Church Principles which has just been discussed. In 1848 De Vere wrote to his good friend Mrs. Edward Villiers praising the high mission of the Anglo-Catholic school. And yet these words are significant in their revelation of an implicit but growing respect for the Catholic Church:

> .....at the same time, I seem to perceive every day with more clearness, that something more is necessary .....that a more authoritative Dogmatic Standard is necessary, as well as a surer guarantee for the 'Sacramental System' and for Ecclesiastical Freedom.. ....I thus find myself daily more disposed to regard the Roman system as the complete type and permanent form of Christianity, that form in which it will be able to do battle at once with the world and with

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(15) Recollections, XV, p. 311.

> heresy, and above all with that vast inroad of infidelity which I regard as certain and not distant. (16)

To Miss Fenwick he confided about the same time that although he had not yet arrived at any convictions regarding the Catholic Church, his reading in Catholic works was gradually making him realize the logic and comprehensiveness of the doctrines.

> Neither can I help observing that ordinary prejudices of the world against Rome are just what might have been expected if her claims were true, and if yet her ministers were not secured from corruption and her means of grace from abuse..... The Church which we at least admit still to produce saints, seems to me the only Church against which such charges are brought, by a world which looks on it as a great Reality, and as one which it (the world) cannot manage. (17)

Gradually, De Vere came to regard the Catholic Church as the only bulwark against the wave of infidelity that was even in his century sweeping over the world. This opinion was given added strength by a discussion in which De Vere participated, which took place at the home of William Mansell, among theologians of three nations -- Döllinger, the German; De Ravignon, the Frenchman; and Manning of England. Of the religious prospects of Europe the "profound" German took a

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(16) Ward, V, p. 167.

(17) Ward, V, p. 167-168.

sanguine view; the "scientifically precise" Frenchman a gloomy one, while all three agreed that the world would soon be isolated into two sections -- the Roman and the Infidel. De Vere recounted the meeting in a letter to his sister in May, 1851, and commented, "Whatever may be the character of their peculiar tenets, the great Common Dogmas of the faith seem to me secure with them only." (18)

Sara Coleridge was the recipient of frequent letters from De Vere during this period of his spiritual unrest. Like Sara's famous father, De Vere believed that the mind of man is unable to grasp even fundamental religious truths like Theism and Immortality. And yet, if the Infidel movement is to be counteracted it must be accomplished by the higher Reason, including the intuitive spiritual perceptions. These perceptions are apt to be weak and changeable in man; they are re-enforced and made steady and clear by the Church. In the Church is represented the wisdom which is best and most consistently expressed in the lives of her saints. Faith, as defined by the Church, makes a clean-cut distinction between practical conviction and a well balanced state of speculation. The Church clarifies Christ's revelation by means of symbolical rites and dogmas; in her liturgy she preserves the meditations of the saints.

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(18) Ward, p. 170.

To this point Coleridge and De Vere were in accord. In fact Coleridge had helped to bring De Vere to this conviction. But while these opinions remained abstract theory with Coleridge, De Vere went farther. Faith which looks reverently to the Catholic Church for guidance is opposed to the attitude of private judgment, the same attitude which had broken up the ancient Catholic Church, which Church still survives in the Roman Catholic Communion. In the Catholic Church, De Vere came finally to recognize the antidote for the harmful and dangerous intellectual technique of private judgment. It was here that he parted company intellectually with some of his best friends, and especially with his cousin, Stephen Spring Rice, who like De Vere lamented the Gorham Judgment for encouraging private speculation in matters spiritual. The intellectual chaos of the Anglican Church during this period was a source of great distress to De Vere as it was to many other Englishmen, not all of whom said with the poet: "I 'lift up mine eyes to the hills,' and see something based on earth but irradiated from Heaven, which changes not in a world of change, and on whose impassive brow are written Strength and Peace." (19)

It was because Coleridge had had this theory however, abstract though it was, that De Vere commented at one time

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(19) Ward, V, p. 168.

that he might easily have become the St. Augustine of the Modern Church just as he is the Plato of English philosophy. Essentially pagan though Coleridge's philosophy was, De Vere believed that he had made certain intellectual concessions to the Catholic Church:

> Coleridge had said some hard things of Rome but his admissions in her favor were much more remarkable. He had asserted that nearly all of her doctrines affirmed great Ideas, but had condensed those Ideas into idols. That seemed to me his rhetorical way of saying that Catholicism was a religion, and not a mere philosophy. Coleridge's 'Philosophy of Pure Reason' had long before shown me that the so-called philosophical charges against the Church were but cavils proceeding from what Coleridge calls "the understanding," as the inferior "faculty judging according to sense;" that many of the charges would militate against the chief mysteries of Revelation; and that, though the philosophy of Locke might make much of them, St. Augustine and Plato would have passed them by with the remark that the question really lay deeper down. (20)

In spite of the tremendous appeal for De Vere in the Catholic Church's unity and stability of doctrine, there were at least two difficulties which prevented the poet's acceptance of the Faith. One of these was what he felt to be excessive definition in medieval and moral theology. It was only after he had convinced himself of the strong philosophical system underlying Catholic theology that he recognized in that system "a practical exhibition of principles which in Coleridge had

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(20) Recollections, XV, p. 315.

been abstract theory." (21) St. Thomas was responsible for this phase of the evolution as De Vere discloses in a letter to Mrs. Hartley Coleridge:

> I have been much occupied of late by a book in five good-sized volumes called 'Theologic Affective.' It is a compendium of Thomas Aquinas' Summa, interspersed with moral and spiritual applications..... It is to me profoundly interesting to see the whole scheme of Roman Catholic theology thus presented together. One part casts light upon another, and doctrines which taken separately seem defective or wrong, when taken conjointly seem complemental to each other. (22)

De Vere's progress toward the Church was impeded by a conviction which is common among those outside the Faith -- that to submit to Rome is to sacrifice one's intellectual liberty. So strong a grip did this idea have upon the poet that the only evidences of prejudice toward Rome can be detected in passages in his correspondence which deal with it. In 1848 he wrote to Mrs. Villiers:

> Charles Buller is here, and has been talking in a manner so Roman Catholic this morning, that if his actions were to follow his opinions he would soon add another to the fold of the infallible Church.....
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> In spite, however, of his expressed opinions, Liberty works in his heart like the milk of a forgotten mother, so that instead of moving on with the

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(21) Ward, V, p. 168.

(22) Ward, VI, p. 186.

> decorous sacrificial procession, a lamb among the lambs, he stands like the goat in the old bas-relief. (23)

The gentle irony of the preceding paragraph is interesting when it is contrasted with these lines written to Mrs. Coleridge shortly before he was received into the Church:

> In submitting to the Church we do not sacrifice our reason but gain access to the Reason of the Race; we do not put out the eye, but use the telescope; we do not discard our personality but burst through our isolations; we rise by humility and submission to the one and universal Point of View, as the evil Angels fell by pride into the prison of darkness. (24)

In October, 1851, just a month before his reception into the Church, De Vere pursued the question of intellectual liberty with Mrs. Coleridge:

> I cannot tell you how intensely I feel that I relinquish nothing, except what, indeed, it is hard to abandon, my own lawless will. All personal agency and intellectual freedom, I feel certain will be mine in a fuller and more real sense than they have been, for the reason of an individual must, if its work be genuine, concur with the reason of the race. (25)

But it is in these lines from Avignon, written on

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(23) W. Ward, V, p. 167.

(24) W. Ward, VI, p. 188.

(25) Ibid., p. 198.

the very day of his reception, November 15, 1851, that the poet discloses most clearly the conviction which he finally attained:

> I firmly believe that in submitting to that authority on which Christ has set His seal, I but exchange a lawless freedom for a glorious Liberty. Reason also tells me, after many deliberations, and a life, in the main, of thought, that though personal action and personal responsibility must ever be ours, it is yet our very highest reason to merge what is merely individually ours in the universal Reason of the regenerate race, and such I believe the mind of the Church to be, guided as it is 'into all truth', by the spirit bestowed on it at Pentecost. Reason, in itself, is a 'light that shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.' But Reason Incarnate is come into the World; and this Wisdom, I believe, speaks to us through the spirit and the Church. To contemplate Reason in this personal way and allow Him to speak to us as little children, seems to me the highest act of reason. (26)

The gradual change in De Vere's attitude toward the Catholic Church and intellectual freedom can be traced directly to his acquisition of one concept which was responsible for the evolution. As soon as the poet became actually convinced that the Roman Catholic Church alone was "the normal guardian of Christianity, of those very truths which were the life of Protestant Christianity itself," (27) he regarded submission to Her authority as an obligation, and he looked upon the

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(26) W. Ward, VI, p. 198.

(27) Ibid., VI, p. 179.

limitations of her doctrines no longer as confining impediments to the liberty of intellect, but rather as safeguards from intellectual chaos. In a letter to Mrs. Hartley Coleridge he epitomizes the long trend of thought which he had pursued since first his interest in religion had become truly strong:

> All this is but a long-winded way of vindicating a belief which seems paradoxical -- that the Philosophy based on a special belief in the Reason as distinguished from the Understanding, will eventually find itself in alliance not only with what it now deems to be exclusively Faith, but with a Faith which, besides spiritual intuition, includes humbler qualities, which not only acknowledge but practically educate a more childlike docility, which recognizes something spiritual in external authority, as complemental to internal perception, and which can without credulity, believe things which it now deems superstitious, and, owing to such belief, can cherish with a stronger faith, more ardent love, and firmer hope, truths which it already recognizes as spiritual truths. That any external authority can produce faith is an absurdity which no Roman Catholic would maintain. Faith is the gift of God, Grace is given to us, like time, moment by moment; the only question is as to the conditions under which it is given, and when given is so exercised as to perform all its right functions and go daily increasing. Personal action is not only the mode but the only mode of intercourse with God; it is with our own eye that we see, whether we use glasses or reject them. But personal action and private judgment are surely wholly different things. I do not think that it is sin in us which prevents us from seeing clearly and certainly all the essential truths of Christianity by the aid of private judgment, but the impossibility of making bricks rightly without straw. (28)

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(28) W. Ward, VI, p. 180.

It has been pointed out previously that two traits dominated De Vere's character -- his desire for moral truth and his sentimentalism. We have analyzed De Vere's search for truth to the point where he was convinced that it was to be found in the Catholic Church. A study of his spiritual evolution would be incomplete however, if certain other influences were not taken into consideration, influences which affected the sentimental side of his nature. One of these was the death of his father.

Sir Aubrey de Vere passed away on July 6, 1846. His death was a beautiful and a peaceful one for his life had been virtuous and devout. De Vere commented upon the quiet impressiveness of his father's passing, and yet one fact about it caused him to look upon the Anglican Church less favorably. That Church which his father had served so devotedly had deserted him, so the poet thought, when he needed its consolation most. Five years before he accepted officially the doctrine of the sacrament of extreme unction, Aubrey de Vere desired a Church which would comfort him when he was dying. And it is interesting to note that he was more interested in consolation than in absolution, for De Vere certainly thought his father was prepared to die.

Several years after Sir Aubrey de Vere's death, the poet's brother Stephen came into the Catholic Church. Like the poet he had long been dissatisfied with the Anglican

Church, and adding to this dissatisfaction was the very positive influence which the goodness of the Irish peasantry, to whom he devoted his life, exerted upon him. After his reception, he published a pamphlet which Aubrey forwarded to Mrs. Coleridge in February, 1851, with this comment:

> I send you my brother's pamphlet. If you do not like it, you need not be afraid of telling me so, for I think it so sound in logic, sense, and temper, that nothing can put me out of conceit with it. It is the first thing he ever wrote, but apparently composition comes easily to him, as he wrote it within a few days, in the broken intervals of his charities -- feeding the hungry, teaching the young, and nursing the dying, only brought into his house to die. You are aware, I believe, that he became a Roman Catholic some years ago. He never read a line of the High Church writers, saying that their books were all patchwork, and that he could smell Romanism in them a mile off. He read very little, but mused and prayed, and said that it was his reflections and observations that converted him. Some people attributed it to the prayers of the poor. (29)

One of De Vere's most appealing characteristics was his devotion to the members of his family. Stephen's selfless interest in the Irish peasantry and his zealous service in their behalf were sources of real pride and admiration to Aubrey. That his brother decided to adopt the religion of the humble people to whom he devoted his life must have impressed the poet and hastened his intellectual progress toward the Church.

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(29) W. Ward, VI, p. 183.

In the effects of conversion upon De Vere are seen once again the prominence of the two characteristics with which we have been dealing throughout this chapter. The poet's acceptance of the Catholic Church entailed sacrifice which involved a most sentimental aspect of his nature -- his friendships. Mrs. Villiers was probably, of all his friends, most intolerant of his final decision, but others of them -- Sara Coleridge, Henry Taylor, Sir William Hamilton, and Miss Fenwick -- were for the most part unsympathetic. Even his beloved mother and sister could not accompany him on his spiritual pilgrimage. Ward says of him:

> He had to go on his way alone. 'Je mourrai seul' was Newman's motto in 1845; and with Aubrey de Vere also it was this rending of the bonds of human affection which gave a painful and dramatic interest to his course during these months, as he followed the guiding star of conscience, feeling intensely inevitable estrangements, the pain of which however, never made him flinch or swerve from his path. (30)

Significant are the words "never made him flinch or swerve from his path" for in them lies the key to De Vere's character. Sentimental though he was about his home, his parents, and his friends, nevertheless his desire for truth was so strong, that he permitted nothing to prevent his attaining of it. These lines written to Sara Coleridge from

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(30) W. Ward, VI, p. 191.

Rome in 1852 are those of one who had found peace:

> The Roman Catholic Church is so very much more than I expected to find it, and that, while a Protestant, I ever imagined a Church could be..... I feel daily also, that Catholicism is really a service of freedom, compared with which every other system founded on Revelation must be either a narrow despotism, or possess only the liberty of anarchy.... The degree in which it distinguishes between the function of the head and heart, and at the same time enlarges the sphere of each, fills me with ever new surprise, as does, yet more indeed, the marvellous instinct as well as habit with which it combines a thorough, genial, hearty, and consistent belief in the Supernatural with an unerring common sense. (31)

De Vere found in the Catholic Church satisfaction for "the head and heart," a satisfaction which is reflected in his poetry. During the years between 1850 - 1855 he lost three who were close to him; Sara Coleridge, who died in 1852; his mother who passed away in 1855, and the beloved Miss Fenwick who died shortly afterward. To replace these losses De Vere bent with new energy to the consecrated task of making known through the agent of poetry the great truths which daily he understood more clearly and loved more devotedly. It is with these truths as they are expressed in De Vere's poetic works that the second section of this thesis is concerned.

PART II

Chapter I

The Spiritual Evolution of Aubrey de Vere as Reflected in His Post-Conversion Poems.

In the preface to a volume of poetical works entitled Poems, published in 1855, Aubrey de Vere makes this statement regarding the function of poetry: "Poetry, like every other authentic art, finds, of course, her proper place among the Handmaidens of Religion." It is the purpose of this chapter to point out that so completely did De Vere make his muse serve the cause of religion, that without this inspiration of the spiritual life, which culminated in his conversion to the Catholic Church, his poetry would be almost without merit.

In understanding the importance of theology in the poetry of Aubrey de Vere, it is important, first of all, that we understand the place that theology held in De Vere's whole conception of religion. That he was deeply interested in it is true. Indeed, this latter fact is, to a great extent, the reason why De Vere is not a more popular poet. At the same time, he in no way overemphasized the importance of theology in religion nor did he confuse theology with religion itself. Rather, he understood thoroughly that theology is the science of religion; that it is the logical explanation of Faith; it is not in itself Faith.

In order that the presentation of De Vere's ideas on the great doctrines of the Church may be an orderly one, the selections utilized will be chosen by their place in the continuity of Catholic doctrine rather than by any order in which they may have been written.

Two general statements may be made regarding De Vere's poetry, statements which will serve to give a unified impression of his work and which may be proved easily by specific examples. The first of these is that while the moral and theological aspects of religion were his inspiration, his expression of those ideas is frequently sentimental rather than intellectual. The second statement is that De Vere's ideas were so great and profound that they cannot be confined for expression within the very simple poetical structures of which the poet made use. A study of his works reveals that he was far more interested in the ideas themselves than in the artistic expression of them. We will find then, that while De Vere possessed many of the qualities of the true poet -- loftiness of thought, a real appreciation of beauty even in the smallest things, the ability to observe closely and accurately, and a power of imagery, his poems contain certain defects. In the first place, De Vere wrote almost entirely in iambic meter, a fact which, of course, when the lines are short, gives a jingle-like movement to his verse. We will observe also that his rhyme scheme is invariably simple - either a,b,c,b, or a,a,b,b, - and that he is eometimes guilty of fill-phrases, eye-rhymes, and elided syllables. It is by no means true that De Vere's medium of expression is always inadequate to his subject matter, but it can be said that De Vere's strength lies in the intellectual power and beauty of his ideas; his weakness

lies in a rather frequent failure to select a poetic form adequate to the expression of those ideas. But these facts can be made clearer by specific references to the works themselves.

It has already been stated that the order of presentation of the poetical selections would be in accordance with the continuity of Catholic doctrine, and so the first quotations will deal with the nature of God Himself.

The fifteenth sonnet in the volume Poems is concerned with the omnipotence of God:

> Virgin! that Power which sends the winds of even'
> To rack the blossoms on the boughs of May,
> That power the Spirits of the winds obey,
> And come and go at His command alone.
> Yea, but for Him the loftiest star of Heaven
> Would drop, supplanted from his glittering throne.
> (32)

The utter dependence of all things upon God was a fact of frequent meditation for De Vere and the idea is to be found recurrent in his poetry. Because of the dignity of the sonnet form the idea is, in this instance, suited to the mode used for its expression. The same comment may be made of these lines from the sixteenth sonnet of the May Carols, published in 1866, which are a meditation on the eternity of God:

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(32) Aubrey de Vere, Poems, p. 100.

He only is Who ever was;
The All-Measuring Mind; the Will Supreme.
Rocks, mountains, worlds, like bubbles pass:
God is; the things not God but seem. (33)

The twenty-first sonnet in Poems treats of the Fatherhood of God, and illustrates the point made previously about De Vere -- that his expression of a great idea is frequently sentimental in its approach:

Father! - the childless Angels cannot call
Upon their God, by that most sacred name!
Brother! - the seed of Adam, one and all,
With Christ Himself true brotherhood we claim. (34)

From the concept of the Fatherhood of God originates, of course, the dignity of man, a doctrine of which De Vere throughout his entire life had a sound and practical knowledge, inspired and nurtured, as has been pointed out previously, by his father and grandfather, and grounded in his religious convictions.

A poem entitled Ode, one of the works on sacred subjects to be found in Poems, contains this reference to the doctrine. This selection serves as an illustration of some of De Vere's technical weaknesses. The idea is too large for the iambic trimeter which he employs, the poem is jingle-like in tone unless it is read very slowly, and the choice of the word

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(33) Aubrey de Vere, May Carols, p. 141.

(34) Poems, p. 271.

adored in the last quoted line is rather obvious in its purpose to rhyme with Lord.

> The marvels of the seas and earth,
> Their works and ways are little worth
> Compared with Man their Lord:
> He masters Nature through His laws;
> And therefore not without a cause
> Is he by all adored. (35)

The method of expression is somewhat more adequate in these lines from the poem Grattan, written in honor of the eighteenth century Irish orator and statesman, although here the idea - that it is within the power of a Saint to serve as the leaven for an entire race - is the poem's best point:

> God works through man, not hills or snows!
> In man, not men, is the God-like power;
> The man, God's potentate, God foreknows;
> He sends him strength at the destined hour.
>
> His spirit He breathes into one deep heart;
> His cloud He bids from one mind depart,
> A Saint! - and a race is to God!
> A man! One man makes a nation's morn. (36)

The tremendous thought that only man, because of his free will, can dare to defy God, is somewhat confined within the narrow limitations of the iambic trimeter and tetrameter of these lines from the May Carols, nor does the simple a,b,a,b, rhyme add to the impressiveness of the expression:

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(35) Poems, p. 181.

(36) Aubrey de Vere, The Sisters, Inisfail, p. 291.

Amid an ordered universe
Man's spirit only dares rebel:
With light, O God, its darkness pierce!
With love its raging chaos quell. (37)

From "A Tale of the Modern Time," one of the longer poems contained in Irish Odes and Other Poems, published in 1869, we find this concise yet comprehensive theological view of man. The lines will illustrate also the power of De Vere's imagery:

In Man the Finite from the Depths ascends -
Center is Man of all men hear or see;
Chapel where time with Incorruption blends,
Where Dust is wedded to Divinity.
All but omnipotent in Will is he.
Freedom his awful privilege..... (38)

Closely linked with the dignity of man is the doctrine of man's soul. This quotation from a poem entitled "A Mother's Song," to be found in a collection of poetry published in 1861, emphasizes the value of the soul to God, Who loves it with a perfect love. The flaw in the lines would seem to lie in the rhythm:

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(37) May Carols, p. 27.

(38) Aubrey de Vere, Irish Odes and Other Poems, p. 204.

From God's great love a soul forth sprang
That ne'er till then had being:
The courts of heaven with anthems rang;
He blessed it, He the All-Seeing!
Nor suns nor moons, nor heaven nor earth
Can shape a soul or match its worth. (39)

Sonnet forty-one of Poems contains the same thought -- a favorite one with De Vere. The rhyme in the third quoted line mars the tonal quality of the poem somewhat:

Then wherefore fear that any human soul,
Small though it be, is worthless in His sight
Whose mercy, like His power, is infinite? (40)

In the lines just quoted, God's mercy is matched with His power. We shall see in the following lines God's most tender attribute, the one on which De Vere loved to dwell, parallel to His justice. The quotation is from the poem "Virgo Virginum" in the May Carols, and combines a picture of the wretchedness of Adam and Eve upon being driven from the Garden of Eden with a reflection upon God's great love for man. Beginning, "the sinless Eden still was fair," the poet continues:

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(39) The Sisters, Inisfail, p. 97.

(40) Poems, p. 281.

They, they alone, whose light of grace
But late made Paradise look dim,
Stand now, a blot upon its face,
Before their God, nor gazed on Him!

They glanced not up; or they had seen
In that severe, death-dooming Eye
Unutterable depths serene
Of sadly-piercing sympathy. (41)

These lines illustrate well the point about De Vere's poetry that has been emphasized - that he conceives a purely intellectual and spiritual idea - that man, coming from the hand of God, was so perfect that even the beauties of Paradise were secondary, as natural beauties are to supernatural ones -- and presents it in a somewhat sentimental way, placing, as he does, the emphasis upon God's mercy, and depicting His sympathy as actually reflected in His eye.

The logical sequence of theological doctrine proceeds from the fall of man to the promise of a Redeemer and the Incarnation. This doctrine is predominant throughout the May Carols, and so closely united is it with the teaching concerning Mary's place in Catholic theology that these excerpts will illustrate both doctrines. Since almost all of the poetical quotations illustrating these doctrines are from the May Carols, it would be well to point out one fact about them, a fact which will help to explain any technical weaknesses

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(41) May Carols, p. 31.

which they may reveal. The Carols were written at the exhortation of Pope Pius IX, and poems which are written upon request are usually not as spontaneous as they might be. Nevertheless some of the lyrics in this collection are beautiful and are among De Vere's best efforts.

The second stanza of the sixteenth Carol contains a tribute to the Blessed Virgin as the Gate of Heaven and an effective reference to Christ's divinity:

> True Gate of Heaven! As light through glass,
> So He Who never left the sky
> To this low earth was pleased to pass
> Through Thine unstained Virginity. (42)

Mater Christi, the ninth Carol, is concerned with Mary's part in the sacrificial mission of Christ. These lines illustrate that by means of imagery De Vere's presentation of an intellectual religious concept is made sentimental:

> Daily beneath His Mother's eyes
> Her lamb matured his lowliness;
> 'Twas hers the lowly Sacrifice
> With fillet and with flower to dress. (43)

The companion lyric to Mater Christi emphasizes Christ's divine nature. Here again the idea is lofty, the

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(42) May Carols, p. 108.

(43) May Carols, p. 36.

imagery is effective, and yet the too-simple rhyme scheme and the brevity of the lines detract somewhat:

> He willed to lack; He willed to bear;
> He willed by suffering to be schooled;
> He willed the chains of flesh to wear:
> Yet from her arms the world He ruled.
>
> One only knew Him. She alone
> Who nightly to His cradle crept,
> And lying like the moonbeams prone,
> Worshipped her Maker as He slept. (44)

To refer to Mary as "the link that blends dust with the Godhead" is an idea truly poetic in its nature. Once more, however, obvious rhyming robs a poem of some of its potential beauty. The lines are from the twenty-first Carol, "Sine Labe Originali Concepta" and deal with the Incarnation:

> The Word made Flesh! the Way! the Door!
> The link that dust with Godhead blends!
> Through Him the worlds their God adore
> Through thee that God to man descends. (45)

It cannot be stressed too frequently that one of the chief merits of De Vere's poetry is its theological accuracy. Ward says of De Vere's devotion to the Mother of God that it had something of the ardor of a gallant knight-errant, and yet one

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(44) Ibid., p. 36.

(45) Ibid., p. 150.

would look far for a student of religion who understood more clearly than did the poet Mary's exact place in the theological scheme. Never did De Vere forget that infinity separated the Blessed Mother from Her Son, and this fact is delicately expressed in the fourth Carol, in spite of the fact that it is a hymn in her praise: Sancta Maria:

> The childlike heart shall enter in;
> The virgin soul its God shall see:
> Mother, and Maiden pure from sin,
> Be thou the guide: the Way is He. (46)

Again, in "Turris Eburnea" the theological clarity that De Vere possessed is illustrated:

> This scheme of worlds, which vast we call
> Is only vast compared with man:
> Compared with God, the One yet All,
> Its greatness dwindles to a span.
>
> Infinite distance still divides
> Created from Creative Power;
> But all which intercepts and hides
> Lies dwarfed by that surpassing Tower. (47)

It can be said of the two stanzas just quoted that the second stanza is more effective than the first. The great thought of the first four quoted lines is weakened somewhat by the brevity of the lines and even more by the obvious rhyming

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(46) Ibid., p. 29.

(47) Ibid., p. 105.

of span and man. The thought in the second stanza, while more subtle than that in the first, is not so expansive, and is more easily confined to the meter.

When Pope Pius IX asked De Vere to write in praise of the Mother of God he had in mind two purposes; to honor her and to correct erroneous impressions of Catholic belief about her. In the fifteenth Carol, De Vere seems to attempt to clarify non-Catholic misunderstanding of Mary's place in the Church:

> Who doubts that thou art finite? Who
> Is ignorant that from Godhead's height
> To what is loftiest here below
> The interval is infinite.
> .....
> The man who grasps not what is best
> In creaturely existence, he
> Is narrowest in the brain: and least
> Can grasp the thought of Deity. (48)

De Vere's mind was so constantly preoccupied with religion that his religious poetry almost invariably contains a freshness of thought which seems to be the result of almost unceasing meditation. He sees in the Mater Dolorosa (Carol thirteen) an interesting parallel to Eve:

> His own in John He gave. She wore
> Thenceforth the Mother-crown of Earth.
> O Eve! thy sentence too she bore;
> Like thee in sorrow she brought forth. (49)

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(48) Ibid., p. 107.

(49) Ibid., p. 40.

One idea of which De Vere was fond, and a beautiful idea it is too, is Mary's place in the Great Thought which preceded the creation of the Universe. The Carol "Predistinata" illustrates this point, although these lines would be more effective if, as has been pointed out frequently before, the lines were longer and the rhymes not so obvious:

> Elect of Creatures! Man in Thee
> Beholds that primal Beauty yet,
> Sees all that man was formed to be,
> Sees all that man can ne'er forget! (50)

The sentiment injected into the imagery of "Foederis Arca" which contains a continuation of the same idea is poetically delicate:

> O then with what a gradual care
> Must thou have shaped that sacred shrine,
> That link of grace, ordained to bear
> The burthen of the Babe Divine. (51)

And again the idea is extended in this selection from a lyric entitled Purification, depicting the Blessed Virgin as one who foreshadowed Pentecost:

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(50) Ibid., p. 29.

(51) Ibid., p. 142.

Great Priestess! round that aurealed brow
Which cloud or shadow ne'er had crossed
Began there not that hour to grow
A milder dawn of Pentecost? (52)

De Vere, meditating upon the mysteries of the Faith, recognized a poetic possibility in the fact that Christ's Mother, who heard His first cry, was present also to hear His dying words. The thought is a beautiful one, but the four lines which give expression to it, although rather effective, reveal De Vere succumbing to the temptations of a fill-phrase - the word aye in the first quoted line. Once again, it should be noted, the approach to the idea is sentimental:

Behold the Babe of Bethlehem! Aye!
The Infant slumbered on Thy breast;
And Thou that heardst His earliest cry
Must hear His "Consummatum est." (53)

The next two quotations will illustrate an important fact about the approximate perfection of De Vere's concept of Our Lady. Because he grasped the fact that Mary was truly great because of her absolute submission to the Divine Will:

Blessed the Mother of her Lord!
And yet for this more blessed still,
Because she heard and kept His Word -
High servant of His Sovereign Will. (54)

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(52) Ibid., p. 60.

(53) Ibid., p. 226.

(54) Ibid., p. 144.

he could write with equal truth these lines about her:

> Behold the greatest gift of Christ,
> Save that wherein Himself He gives,
> The wonder-working Eucharist,
> Sole life of each that truly lives. (55)

Of all of De Vere's poems about the Blessed Virgin, however, there do not seem to be any lines which explain more exactly Mary's place in the spiritual realm than these in which we find united the concise appreciation of Mary's role and another doctrine which has already been discussed - the lofty dignity of man as a son of God and an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven:

> Not for herself does Mary hold
> Among the saints that queenly throne,
> But for the brethren of her Son. (56)

From Christ through Mary comes man's share in the divine life -- sanctifying grace. The teaching that grace is a free gift, as the root of the word suggests, is illustrated in these lines from the forty-sixth sonnet in Poems:

> That Light which is the Life alone can give
> The living Power which makes us love the Light:
> Love it in Faith, and with the Godlike might
> Of Love, to Love's one object cling and cleave -
> But we can only love what we receive. (57)

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(55) Ibid., p. 209.

(56) Ibid., p. 75.

(57) Poems, p. 284.

But it is in the poem which treats of man's indifference to God's gift, that is, in the second of the May Carols, that we have another remarkable example of the point that has been emphasized concerning De Vere's poetic approach to his ideas. The lyric is entitled "Mater Divinae Gratiae," and one of its aims is to explain the theological doctrine of Mary as the Mediatrix of all grace, as well as to point out lack of appreciation of the gift. He utilizes a domestic scene to achieve his ends:

> The gifts a Mother showers each day
> Upon her softly-clamorous brood:
> The gifts they value but for play,
> The graver gifts of clothes and food,-
>
> Whence come they but from him who sows
> With harder hand, and reaps, the soil;
> The merit of his laboring brows
> The guerdon of his manly toil.
>
> From Him the Grace; through her it stands
> Adjusted, meted, and applied;
> And even passing through her hands,
> Enriched it seems and beautified. (58)

Naturally, the Church, the earthly goal of De Vere's spiritual pilgrimage was the inspiration for some of his poetry. He referred to her frequently as the guardian of the great Christian Truths and as the custodian of the sacramental system through whose channels sanctifying grace is dispensed.

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(58) May Carols, p. 46.

A hymn entitled "The Church," one of the deeply religious poems to be found in the 1861 collection, Inisfail, accounts for the source of the Church's power, tracing it, of course, to Christ. As is almost invariably the case with De Vere's poetry the thought and diction are lofty; but the lines are too short:

> As the moon its splendour borrows
> From a sun unseen all night
> So from Christ, the Sun of Justice,
> Draws His Church her vestal light.
> Touch'd by His her hands have healing,
> The Bread of Life, the absolving Key: -
>
> The Word Incarnate is her Bridegroom;
> The Spirit hers; His temple she.
> Hers the Kingdom; hers the Sceptre!
> Fall ye Nations at her feet!
> Hers that truth whose fruit is freedom;
> Light her yoke; her burden sweet. (59)

The saints held a very real fascination for De Vere, for they, he felt, most comprehensively understood the truths of the Faith, and their lives most perfectly translated those truths into action. The volume Poems contains hymns in honor of St. Agatha, St. Lucy, St. Augustine, St. Paulinas, and St. Anastasia at Aquileia. The collection Irish Odes and Other Poems includes a long work dedicated to St. Alexis, a beautiful and spiritual poem which served as a prologue to Cardinal Wiseman's Hidden Gem; a sonnet to St. Cuthbert beginning, "What

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(59) The Sisters, Inisfail, p. 300.

power from Lindisfarne, the Holy Isle, Drave Cuthbert to an islet yet more lone?"; and a poem entitled "St. Columkill's Farewell to the Isle of Arran, on Setting Sail for Iona," which De Vere translated from the Gaelic.

These excerpts from poems written to St. Peter will illustrate De Vere's hagiographical lyrics. The first selection, to be found in Poems and entitled simply "St. Peter," is written in the a,a, - b,b, rhyme scheme:

> Rock of the Rock! From Him alone,
> Eternal Rock, and Cornerstone,
> That Name and Function didst Thou take;
> Through Him that great confession make! (60)

The same theme is contained in this poem to Cephas from the collection Irish Odes and Other Poems:

> On Thee His Church He built; and though, all night,
> Tempests of leaguering demons round it roar,
> The Gates of Hell prevail not; and the Right
> Shines lordliest through the breaking clouds of war.
> (61)

So closely linked are an Irishman's patriotism and his religion that no consideration of the effect that De Vere's change in religious conviction had upon his poetry would be complete without including some mention of it. De Vere's atti-

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(60) Poems, p. 306.

(61) Irish Odes, p. 308.

tude toward his country, and the ever-enlarging concept he had of her position among nations, serve to make clear the fact that while De Vere's spiritual evolution effected certain important changes in his attitude toward the Catholic Church, his acceptance of that institution, as we have said before, in no way revolutionized their scope but rather explained them.

A poem entitled "The Sisters" or Weal in Woe," one of the collection published in 1861, contains the poet's concept of the state, that is, that nations like individuals, have vocations, that they have a definite role to play in the carrying out of God's plan:

> .....Of many nations earth is made!
> Each hath its functions; each its part for others;
> If all were hand, where then were ear or eye?
> If all were foot, where head? (62)

This idea is explained and enlarged in the "Ode to Ireland" as the poet recounts the contributions of the nations to the world's storehouse of knowledge:

> The nations have their parts assigned:
> The deaf are watches for the blind:
> The blind for him that hears not hears:
> Harmonious as the heavenly spheres
> Despite this outward fret and jar
> Their mutual ministrations are.
> Some shine on history's earlier page;
> Some prop the world's declining age.
> .....

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(62) The Sisters, p. 4.

Greece, weak of will but strong in thought,
To Rome her arts and science brought.

Rome, strong yet barbarous, gained from her
A staff; but, like St. Christopher,
Knew nor for whom his strength to use,
What yoke to bear, what master choose. (63)

Concerning Ireland's role in God's plan, one definite idea can be traced through the whole of De Vere's poetry, namely, that Ireland's mission is above all spiritual, a fact which explains much of the suffering she is forced to endure, and her poverty. The poet emphasizes that Ireland passed on the torch of learning and religion to the Continent by means of her monks, and that her destiny in the world is to tend the spiritual fire. De Vere looks upon Ireland as a religious among secular nations, who, because of her vocation must expect self-sacrifice and suffering; under no circumstances should she desire material benefits and comforts. "The Golden Mean," written at Lugano in 1856, praises Ireland's holiness. It will be noted of the poetry that is written about Ireland that it has the same poetical strengths and weaknesses as the purely religious verse. These lines, for example, are lofty in sentiment and contain effective imagery, but there is the same brevity of line, the obvious rhyming, and the forced rhyme in the last quoted line:

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(63) Ibid., p. 83.

> Hail, Poor Estate! Through thee man's race
> Partake, by rulers controll'd,
> The praise of them dis-calced who pace,
> And them that kneel white-stoled;
> Where thou has honors due, hard by
> Obedience stands and chastity. (64)

In "Ode to Ireland, After One of the Famine Years" we find a lyrical sentimental tribute to Ireland as the depository of the Faith. The lines are gentle and tender and delicate:

> Sleep, chaste and true, a little while,
> The Saviour's flock, and Mary's;
> And guard their reliques well, O Isle,
> Thou chief of reliquaries.

In the same poem De Vere reflects upon an attitude toward Ireland that is a favorite one with him -- that that country, in being denied the economic wealth and political power of the world is storing up treasures for eternity. This concept of Ireland is parallel, of course, to De Vere's poetical vision of the country as a religious:

> And if, of every land the guest
> Thine exile back returning
> Finds still one land unlike the rest
> Discrown'd, disgraced, and mourning;

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(64) Ibid., p. 71.

Give thanks! Thy flowers to yonder skies
Transferr'd pure airs are tasting;
And stone by stone thy temples rise
In regions everlasting. (65)

The beauty of the imagery contained in this quotation -- a comparison of Ireland with the rock of the Church because of her unswerving loyalty to the Faith -- is marred somewhat by the short lines and a,a,b,b, rhyme scheme:

Apostle, first of worlds unseen!
For ages, then, deject and mean:
Be sure, sad land, a concord lay
Between thy darkness and thy day.
Thy hand, had temporal gifts been thine,
Had lost, perchance, the things divine.
Truth's witness sole! The insurgent North
Gave way when falsehood's flood went forth:
On the scorn'd coasts deform'd and cleft
Thou, like the Church's rock, wert left. (66)

To depict Ireland as a woman is a favorite device of poets. In "Roisin Dubh" she is portrayed by De Vere as a woman suffering:

O Who art Thou with that queenly brow
And uncrown'd head?
And why is the vest that binds thy breast,
O'er thy heart, blood-red. (67)

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(65) Ibid., p. 80.

(66) Ibid., p. 84.

(67) Ibid., p. 193.

In a work entitled Poem, Ireland is presented as a queen reigning in a realm unknown to most of the Saxon nations. In this lyric and in the one preceding De Vere has utilized the devices of sentiment to explain one of his strongest intellectual convictions:

> No sceptre I hold, nor drink from gold
> Spain's purple wine:
> Yet I rule a queen in the world unseen
> By Saxon eye.
> A realm I have in the hearts of the brave
> In an empiry.
> .....
> But far o'er the sea there is one loves me
> 'Neath the southern star:
> The Fisherman's ring my help shall bring,
> And heal my scar. (68)

The role of queen was one in which Ireland was cast rather frequently by De Vere. One of his most musical lyrics, which he calls Poem, gives this truly charming picture in which "the mourner's keen" is a genuine Irish note:

> She stood like a queen and her vesture green
> Shone out as a laurel sunlighted;
> And she sang a wild song, like a mourner's keen
> With an angel's triumph united.
>
> She sang like one whose grief is done;
> Who has solved Life's dread enigma;
> A beam from the sun on her brow was thrown,
> And I saw there the conquering stigma. (69)

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(68) Ibid., p. 215 - 216.

(69) Ibid., p. 286 - 287.

In still another lyric De Vere depicts Ireland not only as a woman but as a mother, and in these lines the idea occurs again that all of Ireland's earthly troubles are like fires which temper her for eternity:

> Ah mother of Heroes - strong mother! soft nurse!
> .....
> In thy worst dereliction forsook but to prove thee:-
> Blind, blind as the blind worm; cold, cold as the clod
> Who, seeing thee, see not, possess but not love thee. (70)

It has been mentioned once before in this chapter that one of the ideas that De Vere was most anxious to bring home to his readers, the fact about Ireland that he desired to disseminate, was the greatness of her role in bringing the Christian faith and culture not only to the northern countries but to the Continent as a whole. Well aware was he that even the monasteries at Luxeil and Bubbio could be traced to Irish beginnings. Hence these lines in "The Irish Exile at Fiesole:"

> That land men named a younger Rome!
> She lit the North with radiance golden;
> Alone survives the catacomb
> Of all that Roman greatness olden.
> Her Cathall at Tarenti sate:
> Virgilius! Saltzburgh was thy mission!
> Who sow'd the faith fasts long, feasts late;
> Who reap'd returns unvex'd fruition. (71)

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(70) Ibid., p. 289 - 290.

(71) Ibid., p. 218.

The poem which expresses most completely De Vere's picture of Ireland as a religious among secular nations is entitled Religio Novissima. Because the poem is long it is possible to quote only short passages, but even these, brief though they are, reveal De Vere's power of imagery at its best:

> There is an Order by a northern sea,
> Far in the West, of rule and life more strict
> Than that which Basil rear'd in Galilee,
> In Egypt Paul, in Umbria Benedict.
> .....
> Within its courts no high-tossed censer fumes;
> The night-rain beats its cells, the winds its beds..
> .....
> Knowledge is banished from her earliest home.
> .....
> It is not bound by the vow celibate,
> Lest through its ceasing anguish too might cease;
> In sorrow it brings forth; and Death and Fate
> Watch at Life's gate, and tithe the unripe increase.
> .....
> Year after year it fasts -
> .....
> Thou that hast laid so many an Order waste,
> A nation is thine Order! It was Thine
> Wide as a realm that Order's seed to cast,
> And undispensed sustain its discipline. (72)

De Vere is ever consistent in his idea that Ireland, in possessing the Faith, is rich far beyond all other nations. The imagery is effective:

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(72) Ibid., p. 272 - 273.

Sharp lies the shades on the sward close-bitten
Which the affluent meadows receive but half;
Truth lies clear-edged on the soul grief-smitten,
Congeal'd there in epitaph.

A Vision is thine by the haughty lost;
An Insight reserved for the sad and pure: -
On the mountain cold in the grey hoar-frost
Thy Shepherd's track lies sure. (73)

These lines, however, from "The Desolation of the West," one of the poems in Irish Odes and Other Poems, epitomizes in what is some of De Vere's best poetry, Ireland's role in God's plan as the poet thought it to be:

A Land become a monument!
Man works; but God's concealed intent
Converts his worst to best.
The first of altars was a tomb -
Ireland! Thy grave-stone shall become
God's altar in the West. (74)

Aubrey de Vere's disapproval of England, a disapproval which is constant throughout the poems dealing with Ireland, is not a blind untempered one, but rather a conviction that that country exemplifies the type of nation that sacrifices spiritual values to material ones. Today, when so much is being said of a lack of moral standards among nations, it is interesting to note that more than seventy-five years ago De Vere was aware of the approaching anarchy, much of the responsibility for which

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(73) Ibid., p. 293.

(74) Irish Odes, p. 49.

he would place upon England. These accusing lines are from a poem entitled "Colonization," found in the collection Poems:

> England, thy sinful past hath found thee out!
> Washed was the blood-stain from the perfumed hand:
> .....
> England! six hundred years and more,
> Trampling a prostrate realm, that strength out-trod
> Which twenty years availed not to restore. (75)

De Vere's conviction that the solution for the world's anarchy lay in a return to the unity of faith and to the allegiance due to the Interpreter of Faith, the Pope, is obviously logical. It will be recalled that years before he came into the Church, De Vere looked with alarm upon the increasing tide of infidelity which was engulfing the world, a tide which threatened to sever the civilized world from its moorings of truths, of principles. The Catholic Church, he believed, was the only force in the world strong enough to do battle with the opposing power of irreligion, the only force with the authority and the knowledge to teach men their origin, their purpose upon earth, and their destiny. And unless men could be made aware of Him, from whom they came and to Whom they are to return, unless they could be made to realize their dignity as men, the world would continue to be dominated almost exclusively by lust and hatred and greed. Because England's

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(75) Poems, p. 48.

role among nations was a leading one, he was most anxious that she return to the Faith that had prevailed during what he believed had been her most glorious days. Sonnets fifty-one and fifty-two in Poems give expression to this desire:

> Oh for no nation, but the race of man,
> How wide a joy, and for the heavenly host,
> When England, flinging far her insular boast,
> And issuing, queen-like, through eclipse and ban
> Uplifts once more her eagle eyes to scan
> That sovran, sole, and sunlike truth, long lost,
> Which crowns, a never-ceasing Pentecost,
> That See where Priest by Unity began,
> It must be so..... (76)

Because England has been cut off from the Faith and because, as De Vere insists, she has substituted material values for spiritual ones, any comparison which the poet makes of England and Ireland is invariably unfavorable to the former. In "The Sisters" he rather brutally characterizes England as:

> .....a haughty nation proud in arms,
> Nor, as in Saxon times, a crowned child
> Propp'd 'gainst the Church's knee; but ocean's Queen,
> Spanning the world with glittering zone twin-clasped
> By Commerce and by Freedom. (77)

In the same poem he defends Ireland's lack of material wealth by referring to her spiritual treasures:

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(76) Poems, p. 286.

(77) The Sisters, p. 38.

> Say, are there not diversities of gifts?
> Are there no virtues - Industry is one -
> Which reap on earth, whilst others sow for heaven.
> Faith, hope, and love and purity, and patience,
> Humility, and self-forgetfulness,
> These too are virtues; yet they rear not States. (78)

While it cannot be denied that De Vere's love for Ireland, his native country, influenced to some extent his attitude toward England, so sound was his philosophy, so clear his understanding of right and wrong, and so consistent was his devotion to principle that it can be safely said of him that if the moral positions of the two nations had been reversed, he would have condemned Ireland with the same unflinching justice with which he condemned England. For De Vere's disapproval of England was not, as has been said, an unreasoning one. There had existed an England of which De Vere was fond, and he writes of it in some of his best verse in the poem "Chaucer":

> His song was a feast where thought and jest
> Like monk and franklin alike found place --
> Good will's Round Table! There sat as guest
> Shakespearian insight with Spencer's grace.
>
> His England lay laughing in Faith's bright morn!
> Life in his eye look'd rosy and round
> As the cheek of the huntsman that blows on the horn
> When the stag leaps up, and loud bays the hound. (79)

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(78) Ibid., p. 2.

(79) Ibid., p. 64.

De Vere looked forward to real repentance on the part of England for the wrongs which she had inflicted upon his country, and he was intolerant of the slight concessions made by England. These four lines will illustrate, as so many others of those quoted in this thesis have, that De Vere's splendid thought is marred somewhat by the jingling tone which the a,b,a,b, rhyme scheme lends:

> Distrust the repentance that clings to its booty;
> Give the people their Church and the priesthood its right.
> Till then to remember the past is a duty,
> For the past is our Cause, and our Cause is our might. (80)

"The Suppression of the Faith in Ulster" contains a prophesy for England should she fail to repent of the wrongs done to Ireland, and its second stanza contains a truth about the rulers of nations which history has verified from the beginning, and which is of particular interest to the world of today. These lines support once again the statement made about De Vere's poetic technique -- that he couches a high intellectual truth in sentimental diction:

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(80) Ibid., p. 279.

Let England renounce her Church at will,
The children of Ireland are faithful still.
For a thousand years has that Church been theirs;
They are God's, not Caeser's the creeds and prayers!

Thou that are haughty and full of bread,
The crown falls soon from the unwise head!
The nations that rear strange altars up
With glory may feast but with ruin sup. (81)

De Vere saw reflected in the Irish people themselves, the spiritual values which he attributed to the nation as a whole and which are that country's heritage. It is logical that after he himself came to share their faith, his understanding of his fellow countrymen should have been increased, but here again it should be remembered that the acquisition of the Faith merely enlarged and deepened, rather than changed, any of the poet's earlier attitudes. Probably De Vere's best sketch of the Irish peasant is to be found in "The Sisters." These lines show both an intellectual and sentimental appreciation:

Our peasant too has prescience; for he sees;
Earth is his foreground only, rough or smooth;
In him from seriousness the lightness comes.

Too serious is he to make sacrifice
For fleeting good; the battles of this world
He with the left hand fights, and half in sport;
He has his moment and eternity. (82)

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(81) Ibid., p. 224.

(82) Ibid., p. 3.

If patriotism in the best sense includes recognizing one's country's faults, and accordingly those of one's countrymen too, and loving it and them in spite of their short-comings, De Vere was patriotic in the widest meaning of the word. Only an Irishman, and only an Irish Catholic, could have penetrated the Celtic character as he did in the ballad "The Bard Ethell," one of the poems of Inisfail. Ethell, the boastful bard of Brian MacGuire, begins:

> I am clansman to Brian and servant to none;
> Whom I hated I hate, whom I loved love still. (83)

And in those lines we detect, of course, two traits that are most characteristic of the Irishman -- his undying loyalty to his friends and his persistence in bearing a grudge.

In singing the praise of his master, King Malachi, the bard lists the accepted virtues of the thirteenth century Irishman. Malachi was brave and devout; he respected women because he was devoted to the Mother of God; he honored the bards, and, it is important to notice, paid them well; he punished rebels by putting out their eyes and he hung robbers; he founded convents; fed the poor; was generous to orphans; was possessed of wisdom and humility -

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(83) Ibid., p. 141.

> And when he went down to his well-wept grave
> Through the triumph of penance his soul uprose
> To God and the saints,
> Not so his foes. (84)

But the king who followed Malachi had none of his predecessor's virtues, and De Vere catalogues the characteristics which the Irishman disdains:

> The king that came after! Ah woe, woe, woe... (85)

That king "doubted his friend; trusted his foe; bought and sold; pledged his old kingdom and pawned it to avenge a spite; his birth was not foretold by either bard or prophet; he counselled with fools; had boors at his feast; was cruel to Christian and kind to beast," so that

> Men smiled when they talked of him far o'er the wave:
> Well paid were the mourners that wept o'er his grave. (86)

Aubrey de Vere's skill in depicting the Irishman of the thirteenth century can be traced to his sympathetic understanding of the Irishman of the nineteenth century, a comprehension deepened because it was based upon a love for the great

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(84) Ibid., p. 141.

(85) Ibid., p. 141.

(86) Ibid., p. 141.

motivating force of the Irish character -- his Faith.

It is the purpose of this thesis to prove that De Vere's struggle for the Faith and his final attaining of it, was the chief influence upon his poetry, the dominant inspiration of it, and that without that inspiration his work would have been almost without merit. It has been pointed out in this chapter that the best feature of De Vere's poetry is the ideas which it contains. It has been seen from the excerpts quoted in this chapter, that these ideas are, for the most part, entirely religious, covering as they do the entire field of Catholic doctrine. Even where the ideas are political in nature, as they are in some instances in the poems dealing with Ireland, the political ideas are never separated from the spiritual ones, rather they are direct outgrowths of the spiritual convictions. Throughout this chapter it has been illustrated rather frequently that so great were De Vere's conceptions of religious and moral truths, that his poetic modes of expression were too often inadequate to encompass them. This fact has been proved by direct quotations from the poet's works, and in these quotations have also been cited certain weaknesses of poetic technique -- brevity of line where length was required, too simple rhyme schemes, a few examples of fill-phrases, eye rhymes and forced rhymes. It would seem, then, that it can be concluded that the poetry of Aubrey de Vere was so influenced by his deep religious feeling that without this element it would be almost lacking in merit.

PART II

Chapter II

De Vere's Place in Nineteenth Century Poetry.

It would not seem that any study of Aubrey de Vere could be complete unless some attempt, at least, were made to determine his place among the literary men of his own time. But before that can be done intelligently, it is necessary first of all, to consider briefly, at any rate, the last years of De Vere's life.

Ward explains that as De Vere grew older he finally got to the point where controversy between the Churches interested him less, and the great question "Is England, is Europe going to give up Christianity as a dream or a legend?" became the all-important one. This gradual change in interest can be traced rather easily to the clarifying of a fact which long had been a conviction of the poet's -- that no longer was the major religious conflict between Protestantism, on the one hand, insisting that man has a right to work out his spiritual destiny in the light of his own intellect, and the Catholic Church, on the other hand, claiming to be the voice of God upon earth, and therefore the infallible teacher of men. Rather, De Vere saw that which he had feared long before he came into the Church; that which had been prophesied by Dŏllinger, De Ravignon, and Manning at the home of William Mansell -- namely, that the battle lines were more and more definitely the forces of Atheism against the Catholic Church. The poet became increasingly convinced that the spiritual insight and appreciation which had produced the culture of the Middle Ages had been lost

by the modern world. De Vere regretted that science was permitted to go far beyond the boundaries of its own province, and was distracting man's attention from the highest truths of religion.

Most of De Vere's writings during the latter years of his life were devoted to combatting the evils which he felt were bearing down upon the world. The problems which confronted his own country interested him most, of course, and he urged upon the government the question of university education for Catholics, and he turned his literary energies to opposing the secularistic principles in education. In this way he felt that he was contributing a little, at least, to aid the Church in the war against infidelity. The poetry written during the latter years of his life consists of long historical works: The Legends of St. Patrick, in which De Vere contrasts the Irish and the English people; Alexander the Great and St. Thomas of Canterbury -- a poem intended to illustrate two kinds of greatness, pagan and Christian; and The Legends of the Saxon Saints, a picture of early British and Anglo-Saxon England during the seventh century.

As far as De Vere's personal life was concerned, so increasingly devout did he become that he was regarded, according to his niece Mrs. Mansell, as a saint by his relatives and friends. Invariably he referred to his conversion as "the one great blessing of my life." Not long before his death at

Curragh Chase, on January 21, 1902, he wrote:

> As I approach the close of earthly life, every year makes me feel more, that the one great source both of happiness and of peace in our declining years was intended to be Authentic Christianity, as distinguished from the imitations of it set up by men who fancy they make it more easy of acceptance by cutting it down, and divesting it of those high mysteries which alone give it power and reality -- mysteries which no authentic Religion could ever have been without, when propounded to our limited faculties, and none of them really more mysteries than the very first principles of Theism and Morals. (87)

To Aubrey de Vere, religion was man's primary concern upon earth, and as has already been emphasized in the preceding chapter, De Vere's poetry, robbed of its religious element, would lack its one consistent and powerful inspiration. This profound interest in things spiritual was shared by other poets of his time, and so we shall make an effort to determine at this point, how De Vere's poetry compares with some of the other religious poetry of the nineteenth century.

The study that has been made of the poet's life reveals that on the whole it was a singularly happy one. We have mentioned the peace, the devotion, and the culture that surrounded his early years. We have noted De Vere's splendid educational opportunities -- the learned and religious men who

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(87) Ward, X, p. 381.

were his teachers, his advantages for travel, and in his manhood, his associations with profound and distinguished men. Even his spiritual evolution seems to have been uneventful; especially when it is compared with the turbulent Aeneids of other converts. And because De Vere's life was so happy, there is a lack of the dramatic element in his work. His life was bereft of tragedy, of great emotional conflict, and in spite of the fact that he was deeply sensitive to everything about him, and too, as we have said before, sentimental about the things which were dear to him, he is, nevertheless, the cool scholar-poet of the Victorian converts, gifted with powers of observation, objectively expressing his Catholic ideas. His entrance into the Church was not a violent revolution but was rather the anchoring of ideas to a more solid foundation.

It is, therefore, De Vere's objectivity which seems to set him off from so many of the Catholic Renaissance writers, and especially from a man like Francis Thompson, for example, who, because his superior considered him too dreamy and impractical for the priesthood, was haunted throughout his life by what he felt to be a great failure. For Thompson there was no problem of conversion, no careful analysis and comparison of theological ideas as there was for De Vere. Thompson's problem was a life not too well-lived; De Vere's had been beautifully lived. And while throughout his life De Vere never relinquished his search for Truth, Thompson actually fled from It as the

familiar lines tell us:

> I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
> I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
> I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
> Of my own mind: and in the midst of tears
> I hid from Him, and under running laughter... (88)

Thompson's mind, filled with the tragedy of the penitent who has known separation from God, produces a poetry which is essentially dramatic, quick, vivid, yet mystical. And in contrast we have the mind of Aubrey de Vere, eager for moral and spiritual truth, the mind of a man whose entire life was good, who lived a priest-like existence in the world, and whose joy was to express in words from his heart the great ideas which were so clearly grasped by his intellect.

Another of the Catholic Revival poets with whom we might contrast De Vere only to find out that he is unlike him is Coventry Patmore. De Vere the celibate, De Vere the objective has little in common as far as poetic expression is concerned with Patmore, who is the chief mystical interpreter of the sacrament of marriage.

It is rather with John Henry Newman that we are able to find certain real parallels in background and ideas, yet great differences in methods of expression. Newman was prob-

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(88) Francis Thompson, The Hound of Heaven, lines 1 - 5.

ably more nearly like De Vere in his background leading to conversion than any of the contemporary converts who influenced the poet, and of course he saw eye to eye with De Vere the basic concepts of the Church. Nevertheless, as writers in a poetic medium, the differences in their characters may be divined, and with them the resulting differences in their contributions to Victorian poetry. Perhaps the key to the differences in their characters lies in the different lives of Newman and De Vere. Newman the priest, who gave up a high place in one church to begin at the bottom of his chosen Church, knew more of suffering and enforced introspection than did De Vere. De Vere's Recollections have nothing in them of the merciless, penetrating self-examination that is to be found in the Apologia.

Newman and De Vere both were interested in man's dependence upon God, in man's emptiness without God. Their methods of expressing their common Catholic fundamentals however, were different. In "The Dream of Gerontius," Newman depicts the soul's separation from the body by means of a dramatic monologue by the soul. Newman's manner of expressing his religious ideas in poetry seems to rest upon habits of introspection and of deep analysis. He causes the speaker of the monologue, actually himself, to go into specific detail concerning his sense of loss and his need for God, when death comes and the body must return to clay:

'Tis death - oh, loving friends, your prayers! - 'Tis he.
As though my very being had given way,
As though I were no more a substance now,
And could fall back on nought to be my stay,
(Help, loving Lord, Thou my sole refuge, Thou),
And turn nowhither but must needs decay
And drop out the universal frame
Into that shapeless, scopeless, blank abyss,
That utter nothingness of which I came.

* * * * * * *

I had a dream. Yes, some one softly said
'He's gone,' and then a sigh went round the room;
And then I surely heard a priestly voice
Cry Subvenite; and they knelt in prayer.
I seem to hear him still, but thin and low,
And fainter and more faint the accents come,
As at an ever-widening interval.
Ah! whence is this? What is this severance?
This silence pours a solitariness
Into the very essence of my soul;
And the deep rest, so soothing and so sweet,
Hath something too of sternness and of pain.
For it drives back my thoughts upon their spring
By a strange introversion, and perforce
I now begin to feed upon myself,
Because I have nought else to feed upon.
Am I alive or dead? I am not dead,
But in the body still, for I possess
A sort of confidence which clings to me,
That each particular organ holds its place
As heretofore, combining with the rest
Into one symmetry, that wraps me round
And makes me man; and surely I could move
Did I but will it, every part of me.
And yet I cannot to my sense bring home
By very trial, that I have the power.
'Tis strange; I cannot stir a hand or foot,
I cannot make my fingers or my lips
By mutual pressure witness each to each,
Nor by the eyelid's instantaneous stroke
Assure myself I have a body still.
Nor do I know my very attitude,
Nor if I stand, or lie, or sit, or kneel.
So much I know, not knowing how I know,
That the vast universe where I have dwelt
Is quitting me, or I am quitting it;
Or I, or it, is rushing on the wings

Of light or lightning on an onward course,
And we e'en now are million miles apart.
Yet...is this peremptory severance
Wrought out in lengthening measurements of space,
Which grow and multiply by speed and time?
Or am I traversing infinity
By endless sub-division, hurrying back
From finite towards infinitesimal,
Thus dying out of the expansive world? (89)

In the passage just quoted, Newman has the soul remember his deathbed; recall the "feelings" of still being an organic creature and yet unable to direct physical action as in life. De Vere's approach to the expression of such a concept is more objective than Newman's, and his method of embodying religious ideas in poetry seems, therefore, to be less lyric and introspective than narrative or expository and descriptive. It will be noticed in the passage on death that is to follow that De Vere does not speak in the first person singular, which, of course, is the convenient device for introspection:

Oh, hour,
When in brief space our life is lived again;
Down cast the latest stake! when fiends ascend
Beckoning the phantoms of sins forgotten
Conscience to score, or launching as from slings
Temptations new; while Angels hold before us
The Cross unshaken as the sun in heaven,
And whisper, "Christ." Oh, hour, when prayer is all.
(90)

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(89) John K. Newman, "The Dream of Gerontius." Lines 17-25: 179-224.

(90) The Sisters, Inisfail, p. 35.

Aubrey de Vere's place in the Revival of Catholic Letters which began with Newman is an obscure but an important one. De Vere exemplifies in his poetry the Catholic layman who has found in his Faith satisfaction for the whole man -- the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. Every one of these elements is present in his poetry, and the reader who comes upon De Vere for the first time cannot help but respond to the perfect intellectual clarity of his ideas, warmed, as they are by the fires of his own spirituality and love for everything that is good and true and beautiful.

Conclusion

It has already been pointed out that the purpose of this thesis is to prove that religion was the motivating force behind De Vere's poetry, and that without the power of its inspiration his work would have been almost entirely without merit. The thesis reveals that De Vere's poems show an almost complete preoccupation with spiritual themes and that these themes or ideas are the loftiest element in his work. The research reveals also that in many instances the poetical expression of the ideas is inferior to the ideas themselves - so that it is true to say that without the inspiration of religion which produced the ideas, De Vere's poetry would have had little merit.

The conclusion should not be drawn, however, that De Vere's poetical technique was wholly without merit, that he was a versifier or a rhymer with little to recommend him but his religious ardor. This is far from the truth. As the thesis points out, De Vere had many of the characteristics of the true poet - a profound appreciation for beauty and a command of imagery which lends real power to his work. What the thesis should prove, and does, is that De Vere's learning and his literary technique are both secondary to that which is the most striking thing about him - his lucid, objective grasp upon spiritual truths. These he expressed clearly and correctly, in many instances beautifully. De Vere's place among the religious poets of the nineteenth century is that of the scholar-poet,

spiritual and intellectual, who found emotional outlet in expressing the great truths of his acquired Faith and Church, and while differing in his approach from men like Thompson, Patmore, and Newman, takes, nevertheless, a well-deserved place among them.

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The thesis, "The Influence of the Spiritual Evolution of Aubrey de Vere upon His Poetry", written by Kathleen M. Garvey, has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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